



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

FLIRTING WIVES.

BY MRS. AMELIA E. BARR.

IF SOME good and thoughtful woman who died fifty years ago could return to this world, what in our present life would most astonish her? Would it be the wonders of steam, electricity, and science; the tyranny of the working classes, or the autocracy of servants? No! It would be the amazing development of her own sex—the preaching, lecturing, political women; the women who are doctors and lawyers; who lose and win money on horses, or in stocks and real estate; the women who talk slang, and think it an accomplishment; who imitate men's attire and manners; who do their athletic exercises in public; and, perhaps more astonishing than all, the women who make marriage the cloak for much profitable post-nuptial flirtation.

For her own sex engaged in business, she might find excuses or even admiration; and even for the unfeminine girls of the era, she might plead Mrs. Poyser's opinion, that "the women are made to suit the men." But for young wives notorious for their flirting and their "followers," she could have nothing but unqualified scorn and condemnation. For the sentiment demanding absolute fidelity in a wife may be said to have the force of a human instinct; in all ages it has exacted from her an avoidance of the very appearance of evil. Therefore a good woman in the presence of a frivolous flirting wife feels as if a law of nature were being broken before her eyes; since behind the wife stands the possible mother, and the claims of family, race and caste, as well as of conjugal honor, are all in her keeping.

Without any exaggeration it may be said that wife-errantry is now as common as knight-errantry once was. The young men of to-day have discovered the personal advantage and safety there is in the society of another man's wife. They transpose an old

proverb, and practically say : " Fools marry, and wise men follow their wives." For, if the husband be only complacent, it is such a safe thing to flirt with a pretty wife. Young girls are dangerous and might lure them into matrimony ; but they have no fear of bigamy. They can whisper sweet words to a gay, married flirt ; they can walk, and talk, and dance, and ride with her ; they can lounge in her dusky drawing-room or in her opera box, and no one will ask them the reason why, or make any suggestion about their " intentions."

How far this custom affects the morals of the woman is not at first obvious ; but we must insist on this recognized premise : " Society has laid down positive rules regarding the modesty of women, and apart from these rules it is hard to believe modesty can exist. For all conventional social laws are founded on principles of good morals and good sense ; and to violate them without a sufficient reason destroys nicety of feeling, sweetness of mind, and self-respect." It is no excuse to say that propriety is old-maidish, and that men like smart women, or that no harm is intended by their flirtations. The question is : Can married women preserve their delicacy of thought and their nobleness of manner ; can they be truly loyal to their husbands and to themselves throughout the different phases of a recognized flirtation ? It is an impossible thing.

Suppose a beautiful girl to be wooed and won by a man in every way suitable to her desires. She has accepted his love and his name, and vowed to cleave to him, and to him only, till death parts them. The wooing has been mainly done in full dress, at balls and operas, or in hours tingling with the expectancy of such conditions. The aroma of roses, the rustle of silks and laces, the notes of music, the taste of bon-bons and sparkling wines, were the atmosphere ; and the days and weeks went by to the sense of flying feet in a ball room, or to enchanted loiterings in green-houses, and behind palms and flowers on decorated stairways.

The young wife is unwilling to believe that marriage has other and graver duties. She has been taught to live in the present only, and she is, therefore, cynical and apathetic concerning all things but dress and amusements. The husband has to return to business, which has been somewhat neglected ; arrears of duty are to be met. He feels it necessary to attend to the question of supplies ; he is, likely, a little embarrassed by the long holiday of wooing

and honeymooning, and he would be grateful for some retrenchment and retirement, for the purpose of home-making.

The young wife has no such intentions; she resents and contradicts them on every occasion; and after the first pang of disappointment is over, he finds it the most prudent and comfortable plan to be indifferent to her continued frivolity. He is perhaps even flattered to find her so much admired; perhaps, in his heart, rather thankful to be relieved from the trouble of admiring her. As for any graver thoughts, he concludes that his wife is no worse than A's and B's and C's wives; that she is quite able to take care of herself, and that in a multitude of adorers there is safety.

Thus, in a majority of cases, begins the career of the married flirt. But the character is not a corollary of marriage, if the proper conditions were present when the wife was a young woman. There is no salvation in the Order of Matrimony; no miracles wrought at the altar of Grace Church, or at St. Thomas's. She that is frivolous, giddy, and selfish is likely to continue frivolous, giddy, and selfish; and marriage merely supplies her with a wider field and greater opportunities for the indulgence of her vanity and greed.

She reënters society with every advantage of youth, beauty, wealth, and liberty; released from the disabilities under which unmarried girls lie; armed with new powers to dazzle and to conquer. No longer a competitor for a matrimonial prize, she is a rival ten times more dangerous than she was. Setting aside the wrong done to the sacredness of the connubial relation, she now becomes the most subtle enemy to the prospects of all the unmarried girls in her set. What is the bud to the perfect rose? The timid, blushing maiden pales and subsides before the married siren who has the audacity and charm of a conscious intelligence. It is not without good reason that special balls and parties have come into fashion for social buds; they are the necessary sequence to the predominance of married sirens, with whom in a mixed society no young girl can cope. They have the floor and the partners; they monopolize all the attention, and their pleasure is of the greatest importance. And their pleasure is to flirt—to flirt in all places and at all hours.

In vain will some young aspirant to marriage display in the presence of the married flirt her pretty accomplishments. She may sing her songs, and play her mandolin never so sweetly, but

the young men slip away with some one or other of the piquant brides of the past year. And in the privacy of the smoking-room it is the brides, and not the young girls, who are talked about—what dresses they wear or are likely to wear, how their hair is done, the history of the jewels which adorn them, and the clever things they have said or implied.

Before we condemn too much the society girls of the time, we ought to consider the new enemy who stands in the way of their advancement to marriage. Is it not quite natural that the most courageous girls should refuse the secondary place to which married flirts assign them, and endeavor to meet these invaders with their own weapons? If so, much of the forwardness of the present young girl is traceable to the necessity forced upon her by these married competitors. For it is a fact that young men go to the latter for advice and sympathy. They tell them about the girls they like, and their fancies are nipped in the bud. For the married flirt's first instinct is to divest all other women of that air of romance, with which the nobility and chivalry of men have invested womanhood for centuries. So she points out with a pitiless exactness all the small arts which other women use; and is not only a rival to some young girl, but a traitor to her whole sex.

And yet she is not only tolerated but indulged. People giving entertainments know that their success will be in a large measure dependent upon the number of beautiful young wives present. They know the situation is all wrong, but they are sure they cannot either fight the wrong, or put it right; and in the meantime their particular ball will not increase the evil very much. Not fifty years ago, it was the young beauties that were considered and looked after, and the gentlemen asked to an entertainment were asked with reference to the unmarried girls; for it was understood that any married women present would, of course, be wrapped up in their own husbands. Then a wife accepting attentions from one young man after another would have aroused the contempt and disapproval of every man and woman present.

Vanity in the first place leads young wives to flirting, but grosser motives soon follow. For whatever other experiences matrimony brings, it generally stimulates a woman's love of money; and the married siren soon makes her "followers" understand that she is "a very practical little woman, and does

not care for a sonnet, or a serenade, or a bouquet of fresh flowers." A summer's cruise in a fine yacht, a seat on a coach, an opera box, a jewel, dinners, drives and luncheons, are the black-mail which the married flirt expects, in return for her sighs, sentiment, and advice.

It is indeed curious to note the change of fashion in this respect. Let any one turn over the novels of half a century ago, and he will see that the favorite plan for compromising a woman's honor was to induce her to accept the loan of money, or the gift of jewels. If the unfortunate heroine did so, no novelist would have dared to offer an apology for her. But this age of luxury and laxity has exploded the scrupulous delicacy of the Evelinas and Cecilias of the old tales, and the splendidly free, feminine Uhlans of our modern society laugh to scorn the prim modesty of the Richardsonian standard. They assert, if not in words yet by their actions, the right of a woman to make her fascinations serviceable to her.

Some married women contend that their flirtations are absolutely innocent friendships. But in all stations of society, it is a dangerous thing for two people of the opposite sex to chant together the litany of the church of Plato. The two who could do it safely would be the very two who would never dream of such an imprudence. Those who enter into "friendships" of this kind with what they think are the most innocent intentions, should sharply arrest themselves as soon as they are "talked about." For in social judgments, the dictum that "people talked about, generally get what they deserve" is true, however unjust it may appear to be.

Another class of married flirts scorn to make any apology, or any pretence of mere friendship. They stand upon the emancipation of women, and the right of one sex to as much liberty as the other. This kind of siren boldly says: "She does not intend to be a slave like her mother, and her grandmother. She does not propose to tie herself, either to a house or a cradle." She travels, she lives in yachts and hotels, and she does not include a nursery in her plans. She talks of elective affinities, natural emotions of the heart, and contrasts the opportunities of such conditions, with the limitations and the monotony of domestic relations. She makes herself valueless for the very highest natural duties of womanhood, and then talks of her enfranchisement! Yes,

she has her freedom, and what does it mean? More dresses and jewelry, more visits and journeys; while the whole world of parental duties, and domestic tendernesses, lies in ruins at her feet.

The relegation of the married flirt to her proper sphere and duties is beyond the power of any single individual. Society could make the necessary protest, but it does not; for if Society is anything, it is non-interfering. It looks well to it, that the outside, the general public appearance of its members, is respectable; with faults not found out, it does not trouble itself. A charge must be definitely made, before it feels any necessity to take cognizance of it. And Society knows well, that these married sirens draw like magnets. Besides, each entertainer declares: "I am not my sister's keeper, nor am I her Inquisitor or Confessor. If her husband tolerates the pretty woman's vagaries, what right have I, what right has any one, to say a word about her?"

But it is a fact, that if Society frowned on wives who arrogate to themselves the privileges both of young girls and of wives, the custom would become stale and offensive. If it would cease to recognize young married women who are on the terms with their husbands described by Millamant in "The Way of World"—"as strange as if they had been married a long time, and as well bred as if they had never been married at all," young married women would behave themselves better. It is generally thought that Mr. Congreve wrote his plays for a very dissolute age; in reality, they seem to have been written for a decorous, rather strait-laced generation, if we compare it with our own.

AMELIA E. BARR.